2008-03779/

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Separatists must clarify statements undermining cultural community rights

OTTAWA, February 28, 1995 "It is essential that the separatists clarify their statements which undermine the rights of cultural communities. Don't they realize that all Canadian citizens are equal with equal rights and responsibilities. Discrimination is not acceptable in this land of great diversity," said the Honourable Sheila Finestone, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women).

Mrs. Finestone was reacting to statements that Quebec's separatist leaders have made which suggest that they regard ethnocultural communities and English-speaking Quebecers as second-class citizens.

Bernard Landry, Vice-premier and Minister for International Relations, Immigration and Cultural Communities, had made disparaging comments about ethnocultural communities to the newspaper Le Devoir on February 24. Bloc Québécois Member Philippe Paré stated on Sunday that ethnocultural communities should not participate in the proposed Quebec referendum and let the "old-stock Quebecers" decide the province's future. Pierre Bourgault, till recently a special adviser to Premier Jacques Parizeau, told a Bloc Québécois meeting on Sunday that Quebec's anglophones are "racist" because they oppose Quebec's separation.

"It is pure demagogy to suggest that cultural communities should have fewer rights than any other citizens. Canada's diversity is recognized around the world. It is a richness that is reflected in our cultural, ethnic and regional pluralism. The whole of this reality forms Canadian culture which is more than the sum of its parts," said Mrs. Finestone. Mrs. Finestone noted that in his address to Parliament last Thursday, President Bill Clinton of the United States said: "In a world darkened by ethnic conflicts that literally tear nations apart, Canada has stood for all of us as a model of how people of different cultures can live and work together in peace, prosperity and understanding."

The goals of the federal multiculturalism policy are integration, institutional change and fighting bigotry.

"It is a shame that the separatists do not recognize that same sense of pride in our diversity and in our respect of minority rights, as do leaders from around the world," concluded Mrs. Finestone.

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